

From: Maurice Davis
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/26/01 7:22pm
Subject: Public comment - US v Microsoft

December 26, 2001

To Whom It May Concern,

I write to comment on the proposed Microsoft settlement. I am a software developer and user. I use Linux and various open source software packages for most of my day to day activities because they are technically superior to and much more stable than Microsoft products (as an example, I last rebooted this computer 141 days ago when I upgraded the Linux operating system on it - and this despite the fact that I run web sites and mail services for 20 different small companies and groups on it in addition to a full graphical windowing interface).

While I love the software I use, I find that I can not avoid the need to maintain at least one computer with Microsoft software loaded on it. This is because of their file format lock-in. I need their software only to read their file formats. So, I beg of you, require Microsoft to openly publish their past, present and future file format specifications. In doing so you will also be doing a great service to the country. How many documents being written today will be totally useless 10 years from now simply because they are stored in a .doc file format that has long since been outdated by later Microsoft treadmill upgrades? Must we really maintain old Microsoft applications just to access the information locked away in their proprietary file formats? Here I stress the "openly publish" part of my request. It is essential that open source programmers have unmediated access to this information as we currently represent the only real competition to Microsoft. I don't ask for access to their code, who would want it anyway, just the file format specs so that I can get at users' data. Remember that the data does belong to the user after all.

I also have a second request. Require operating system software and bundled application software to be priced and sold separately from the underlying hardware. It is in large part because of Microsoft's past exclusive tie-ins with PC vendors that they were able to establish their monopoly to begin with. How else do you explain the low penetration rate of IBM's superior OS/2 operating system. If you wanted OS/2, you had to first buy a PC with Windows preloaded, then spend for OS/2. As recently as two weeks ago, I was in MicroCenter, a large computer store in Tustin, California. I asked if I could buy a PC without Windows preloaded and was told I could not. Of course, I am sophisticated enough to seek out one of the few vendors who would do this or to piece together my own machine, but what real choice does the average consumer have? Incredibly, many believe that Windows comes free with the computer. Separating the hardware and software purchase will reveal the true cost of competing options and make it more likely that consumers will inquire about alternatives when it is no longer implicit that buying a PC means buying Windows as well.

Put yourself in the place of the average computer buyer and imagine the affect of just these two changes. Now, you walk into a store looking for a computer. There are many brands to choose from. Choices of processor, disk drives, CD-ROM drives and burners, etc. can be weighed on a cost benefit basis but, no matter your selection, you always get Windows because it comes with

the computer and, even if you know enough to ask, you're told that it's the only option. Oh, and by the way, you better get that with Microsoft Works or Office or else no one will be able to read your files and data you bring home from work will be totally unusable. Contrast that with a scene in which the buyer learns that Windows will cost an extra \$50 or \$100, or whatever it costs, on top of the price of the computer. You mean, I could get something other than Windows? Sure, there's OS/2 or BSD or Linux, and BSD or Linux cost much less and are better systems in addition to being easy to use. OK, but what about file compatibility - will I be able to read and write .doc files I get from work and friends? Sure, there are many fine word processing and spread sheet programs which will read those files and better yet you can store your information in universally readable XML format so that they never go out of date. I think that we would then have a choice again and Microsoft would be forced to really compete on price and quality again. As things stand now, they're always a step ahead in the lock-in game.

Sincerely,
Maurice Davis
25 Morning Dove
Irvine, CA 92604
714-549-9745
mjd@networklogic.com